

Sri Lanka

By F. M. G. STAMMERS, M.A., M.B., B.S.

I have taken 'The Entomologist's Record' for many years — but I do not remember any article on the Butterflies of Ceylon. I thought that the following might be of interest to readers. I know most Eastern countries well, but of all these I consider Sri Lanka the nearest to Paradise. The temperature varies little throughout the year; it is usually about 26 deg. or 27 deg. C., and humid in the southern Low Country. Water is plentiful owing to the monsoon rains—N.E. and S.W. It is conserved in many huge tanks—artificial lakes. The flora ranges from temperate in the Hill Country—to tropical. The many varieties of coconut are ubiquitous: the colours of the bananas range from green to the yellows, and even pink. There are superb pineapples, and every imaginable fruit to delight the eye as well as the palate. The Island is some 270 miles long — from Point Pedro in the north, to Dondra Head in the south. It is about 140 miles across at the widest point. The mountains rise to 8820 feet. Although 5° to 10° north of the Equator, frosts occur at night in the mountainous districts. Seen from a low-flying aircraft, the Low Country is brilliant with the chequers of the vividly green 'paddy' fields. Butterflies are numerous, and occur almost everywhere. There are 250 species in an area about half the size of England. The Sinhalese and Tamils are gentle, kind and with gracious manners. English people are accepted wherever they go. Most people speak English, others are extremely fluent. I would like to say more about Ceylon, but I must confine myself to Entomology.

In 1942-3 I spent a year in Ceylon as a Medical Entomologist in the Royal Navy. During that time I made a collection of butterflies. This was in no way complete, as I could only collect when I was off duty. Even then I was somewhat restricted as to where I could go. I returned to Ceylon during the winters of 1971-2, and 1972-3. I took an excellent book—'THE BUTTERFLY FAUNA of CEYLON', by L. G. O. Woodhouse. Also my net. As soon as I had identified a butterfly I had caught—I let it go. I have come to a stage in life when I would rather see insects flying free; than killed and put in a cabinet. To my knowledge there are 48 species of Blues. I give no names for these—as they were mostly small, and difficult to identify without damage. They only flew a foot or so before settling again, and kept near to the ground. They were very common on grassland around Trincomalee. Also I do not list any Hesperidae—47 species. I only took my net occasionally; as I was more interested in the varied aspects of Ceylon life, and the magnificent scenery. The butterflies mentioned were seen in the following districts:—Colombo, Mount Lavinia, Negombo, Polonnaruha, Anuradhapura, Jaffna, Nuwera Eliya, Kurunegala, and particularly around the Harbour of Trincomalee.

On Christmas Day 1972 there were seven or eight monsoon storms at Trincomalee. The N.E. monsoon was a heavy one

that year. I saw many *Precis iphita pluvialalis* on the wing. The next day was very hot and humid with a light breeze. On the Island of Great Sober—so named, as the British used to land drunken sailors there to 'cool off'—in the Inner Harbour; I saw *Precis almana almana*, and a number of *Phalanta phalantia* and *Ariadne ariadne minorata*. This was sheer jungle, and impossible to penetrate far without machettes (I had hoped to return with these another day; but was then told that it would be unwise—as there were bears on the Island).

Many of the butterflies were feeding on *Antigonon leptopus*—(Polygonacea) which was growing near the sea. At Mount Lavinia—on the cliffs, there were very large patches of this plant covering the ground, with its attractive pink flowers.

The following are the species taken by me, and in my cabinet; or those set free after identification:—

DANAIDAE.—*Danaus similis expromata* Butler, *D. limniace mutina* Fruhstorfer, *D. aglea aglea* Cramer, *D. chrysippus* L., *Euploea phaenareta corus* F., *E. core asela* Moore, *E. klugii sinhala* Moore.

SATYRIDAE. — *Ypthima celonica* Hewitson, *Orotiaena medus mandata* Moore, *Melanitis leda ismene* Cramer, *Elymnias hypermestra fraterna* Butler.

NYMPHALIDAE.—*Precis orithya swinhoei* Butler, *P. iphita pluvialalis* Fruhstorfer, *P. almana almana* L., *P. lintingensis hierta* Fruhstorfer, *Hypolimnas bolina* L., *H. misippus* L., *Nephtis hylas varmona* Moore, *Cethosis nietneri nietneri* Felder & Felder, *Ariadne ariadne minorata* Moore, *Telchinia violae* Fruhstorfer, *Phalanta phalanta* Drury.

ERYCINIDAE.—*Abisara echerius prunosa* Moore.

LYCAENIDAE.—*Talicauda nyseus nyseus* Guérin-Ménéville, *Castalius rosimon rosimon* Fruhstorfer, *Loxura atymnus arcuata* Moore.

PIERIDAE. — *Eurema hecabe simulata* Moore, *E. blanda silhetana* Wallace, *E. brigitta rubella* Wallace, *Delius eucharis* Drury, *Leptosia nina nina* Fruhstorfer, *Hebomoia glaucippe australis* Butler, *Catopsilia pyranthe pyranthe* L., *C. pomona daraba* Felder & Felder, *Huphina nerissa phryne* Fruhstorfer, *Appias albina paulina* Cramer.

PAPILIONIDAE.—*Papilio polytes romulus* Cramer, *P. demoleus demoleus* L., *P. crino* Fruhstorfer, *Polydorus hector* L., *P. aristolochiae celonicus* Moore, *Troides helena darsius* Gray, *Chilasa clytia lankeswara* Moore.

The Old Farm House, East Street,
Bluntisham, Huntingdon.